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Review of Gregori Bon, Nataaa and Jaka Repi places: Relations, return, and belonging

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BOOK REVIEW

GREGORIČ BON, NATAŠA AND JAKA REPIČ (eds). *Moving places: Relations, return, and belonging*, (EASA Series, 29). New York, Oxford: Berghahn. 2016. 240 pp. ISBN 978-1-78533-242-5 (hardback); eISBN 978-1-78533-243-2 (eBook).

Moving Places: Relations, Return and Belonging promises to approach 'places not as fixed points on geopolitical maps, but as processes, continuously redefined and relocated within a particular social, political, historical and economic setting' (p. 2). The introduction, written by editors Nataša Gregorič Bon and Jaka Repič, traces the discipline's shift from notions of fixity, boundedness, and homogeneity, to concerns over flux, movement, and change. In the study of space and place this shift was instigated by the groundbreaking works of Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, Tim Ingold, Doreen Massey, and Sarah Green, who have variously addressed the processual, dynamic, and relative qualities of spatiality. The introduction probes these dimensions through the analytics of movement. In this framing, place unfolds through the social and spatial relations that it comes to kindle, mediate, and host. Movement, therefore, not only alters people's own relative positions. Rather, by inducing changes in connections and separations between people and places, movement also alters the 'relative locations' (Green 2005) of the spaces navigated.

The volume's contributions explore case studies from Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Africa, with four out of nine ethnographic chapters being concerned with the broader social and spatial repositionings that ensued from the collapse of former Yugoslavia. While conceptually focused on 'moving places', the ethnographic angle adopted by the contributors

is largely centred on the (non-)movements of people. The value of this focus is twofold. First, the volume contributes to a series of pervasive anthropological themes, including processes of migration and transnationalism, instantiations of centre and periphery, and the politics of identity and belonging. Second, in bringing together diverse kinds of movements, which differ in terms of their scales, scopes, temporalities, and indeed, geographical spans, the volume demonstrates that, inasmuch as place and space are not static, movement is not monolithic. The variegated conditions, perceptions, and implications of (im)mobility explored by the contributors, are shown to be intimately entangled with the places that movement calls into existence.

As Sarah Green notes in her afterword, the volume concerns the (im)mobility of concepts, as much as it concerns the (im)mobility of places. Notions associated with spatial fixity are shown to be mobile and, likewise, mobility is argued to be permeated by experiences of fixity. In Chapter 1, Noel B. Salazar explores the prestigious and largely male Indonesian mobility tradition of *Merantau*, which refers to trips away from home for economic and other sociocultural purposes. This centuries-old tradition has not remained unaffected by modernity, global capitalism, and international (female) labour mobility. What once used to be a primarily circular movement, which sought to bring cultural and economic capital to the homeland, is now increasingly

becoming a journey of permanent migration. Likewise, spatially fixed notions of 'home' are now giving way to visions of 'mobile modernity', to relations sustained through communication technologies, and finally, to invaluable yet short homecoming trips. For the Manchineri of Brazilian Amazonia, explored by Pirjo Kristiina Virtanen in Chapter 6, movement produces bodies, skills, relations, and places, and amounts to a constant process of becoming. Akin to the tradition of *Merantau*, Manchineri's visits to urban centres outside their territory bring knowledge and power, but must always involve an objective and a return. In this capacity, what may appear as a clearly bounded and demarcated indigenous territory, is in fact a fluid meshwork composed of movement-mediated relations with other beings, state authorities, and centres of political and economic power.

As implied by the volume's subheading, homecoming and return mobilities constitute key themes. In Chapter 3 Gregorič Bon examines the seasonal return of expatriate Albanians who have migrated to Greece. Their natal place of Himara, located in Southern Albania, is argued to have multiple 'relative locations' and to constitute a 'home' courtesy of the (non-)movements it motivates, thus connecting here and there, past and present, the material and the imaginary. Chapter 4, written by Repič, examines the Slovenian diasporic community of Argentina, whose members fled Slovenia after the Second World War and the communist revolution. During their forty-year-long inability to return, the refugees established a strong introverted ethnic community, driven by anti-communist ideology, notions of 'Slovenianness', and mythologies of return. When, however, Repič's interlocutors started returning to their homeland, after Slovenia's independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, they discovered that their memories did not always

align harmoniously with their contemporary experiences of Slovenia. These feelings of ambivalence, argues Repič, not only show 'home(land)' to be a mobile concept, but they also reconfigure the social, spatial, and temporal distance between Slovenia and Argentina.

Another thread of the volume concerns the complication of common narratives, which treat mobility as a necessary precondition and a positive outcome of globalisation and cosmopolitanism, or alternatively, as a fragmentary and even dangerous condition. In Chapter 8, Alenka Janko Spreizer argues that while ethnic-essentialist representations associate nomadism with marginalisation, for the Romani communities of Ksrko, southeastern Slovenia, nomadic and sedentary lifestyles entail interconnected processes. Movement, in other words, does not foreclose feelings of belonging, and neither does emplacement cancel conditions of poverty and exclusion. A similar point is made by Aija Lulle in Chapter 2, which focuses on Latvian migrant workers in the British Channel Island of Guernsey. Guernsey has formed a popular destination for Latvians seeking seasonal labour since Latvia's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Often perceived as both an avenue to Europe and a means to better futures, the journey to Guernsey requires migrants' constant rotation. Latvians' temporary and volatile movements between homeland and Guernsey, however, argues Lulle, are not free of place-specific attachments, embodied emotions, or experiences of personal growth, aspects which normative representations of circular migration often overlook. In Chapter 9 Thomas Fillitz addresses state-mediated shifts in Ivory Coast's spatialisation and mobility patterns. Over the course of 60 years, the Ivorian state moved from metaphors of brotherhood and hospitality, to proclamations of sovereignty, and later to autochthonous and exclusive

criteria of citizenship. Essentialist processes of rooting, argues Fillitz, do not grant a return to 'traditional' sedentarism, but rather contribute to 'an ongoing production of vernacular modernity' (p. 207).

While the majority of the contributions focus on people's movements between places, Chapter 5, authored by Miha Kozorog, is concerned with locals' active attempts to relocate the peripheral and quiet Slovenian countryside town of Cerklje. The annual festival, Jazz Cerklje, turns the town into a popular destination of effervescence and cosmopolitanism, thus temporarily generating a different locality and altering Cerklje's position within the local-global and centre-periphery nexuses. Locality and place-making is also the topic of Chapter 7, where Zaira Tiziana Lofranco looks into the Sarajevo Inter Entity Boundary Line that became fully implemented after the Dayton agreement. Aimed at separating the supposedly ethnically homogeneous Serbian Republic and the Croat-Muslim Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the military-imposed boundary cut through Sarajevo, restricted people's movements, and altered the outlook of the city, thus generating feelings of displacement and disorientation. In the post-war period the boundary continues to exert its dividing effects, while 'the production of locality is enhanced as a dynamic and relational sociocultural process, as long as sarajevo's daily (im)mobility turns familiar spaces into unfamiliar, reshuffling centre and margins, and transforming old connections into disconnections to be bridged in new ways' (p. 168).

Overall, *Moving Places* entails a collection of case studies that engage the 'key question [of] how people make places through movement' (p. 2). The framework mobilised to this end is not without precedent. Indeed, the strength of the volume does not lie so much with its innovative approach, but rather with its commitment to existing theoretical work that has argued space and place to be everything but static. The places explored by individual contributions are shown to shift alongside people and the (im)possibilities of movement, while the relationship between spatiality and movement is explored across a wide range of ethnographic contexts. As is often the case with edited volumes, *Moving Places* prompts readers to think comparatively, but linkages between individual chapters are not always made explicit. This occasionally feels like a missed opportunity, given that the volume's greatest contribution, in my view, concerns the variety of guises that spatial relationality assumes and the different tempos that operate in spatial movements.

REFERENCES

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